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ABSTRACT

A study used data collected under the Australian Vocational Education Training and Management Information System Standard to examine the effectiveness of enabling courses (lower-level preparatory and prevocational) in assisting members from "disadvantaged" backgrounds to progress to other training programs. It also identified factors that influence the likelihood of these individuals enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification. Students who completed an enabling course in 1997 were tracked in 1998. The level of qualification of the course undertaken by these students in 1998 was compared to the level of qualification of the enabling course completed in 1997. Findings indicated enabling courses produced positive outcomes for many people. Nevertheless, while not all enabling course students were moving from one enabling course to another, the tendency for some students to enroll in the same level of qualification in the following year raised some concern. Moreover, those who decided to enroll in the same level of qualification in the following year were usually enrolled in the same enabling course. These students were more likely to be women, adults aged 40-64, students with a disability, students from a non-English speaking background, and students whose highest level of secondary schooling was year 9 or below. (YLB)

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The effectiveness of enabling courses in assisting individuals to progress to other training programs

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In the VET sector, students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, students from a non English-speaking background and those with a disability were at least three times more likely to enrol in lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses known as enabling courses than other Australians. Students from other 'disadvantaged' groups such as those who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their VET program, or students whose highest level of secondary schooling was below year 12, were also more inclined to undertake studies in these lower-level courses.

This paper provides information on the progression of enabling course students within the VET sector. In particular, the paper examines the factors that influence the likelihood of an enabling course student enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification.

The study found that enabling courses in fact do produce positive outcomes for many people. Nevertheless, while not all enabling course students are moving from one enabling course to another, the tendency for some students to enrol in the same level of qualification in the following year raises some concern. Moreover, those who decided to enrol in the same level of qualification in the following year were usually enrolled in the same enabling course. These students were more likely to be women, students with a disability, students from a non English-speaking background and students whose highest level of secondary schooling was year 9 or below.

In the vocational education sector, students undertaking lower-level courses such as 'Job seeker preparation and support program', 'Employment skills development program', 'English as a second language' or 'Adult literacy and numeracy' are predominantly those who come from a 'disadvantaged' background. In 1998, students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, students from a non English-speaking background and those with a disability were at least three times more likely to enrol in these lower-level courses, known as enabling courses, than their counterparts. Students from other 'disadvantaged' groups such as those who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course, or students whose highest level of secondary schooling was below year 12, were also more inclined to undertake studies in these courses.

Aims

This study utilises the data collected under the Australian Vocational Education Training and Management Information System (AVETMIS) Standard[1] to examine the effectiveness of enabling courses in assisting members from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds to progress to other training programs. The study also identifies factors

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that influence the likelihood of these individuals enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification.

This paper reports some of the findings reported in Phan and Ball (in press).

Methodology

To determine the effectiveness of enabling courses in assisting members of 'disadvantaged' backgrounds to progress to other training programs, students who completed an enabling course in 1997 were tracked in 1998. The level of qualification of the course undertaken by these students in 1998 was compared to the level of qualification of the enabling course completed in 1997.

Following the successful completion of a course, a student can receive one of the following qualifications:

- Diploma
- Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) - Certificate IV or equivalent
- AQF - Certificate III or equivalent
- AQF - Certificate II or equivalent
- AQF - Certificate I or equivalent
- AQF - senior secondary
- Certificate of competency
- Certificate of proficiency
- Endorsements to certificates
- Statement of attainment.

A student is considered to have enrolled in a 'higher' level of qualification if he/she in 1997 enrolled in 'AQF Certificate II' and subsequently enrolled in 'AQF Certificate III', 'AQF Certificate IV' or 'Diploma' in 1998. However, if the same student had enrolled in 'AQF Certificate I' in 1997, then this student would be considered to have enrolled in a course at a 'lower' level qualification. Alternatively, if this student was undertaking a course which resulted in a 'Certificate of competency', 'Certificate of proficiency', 'Endorsements to certificates' or 'Statement of attainment' in 1998, then this student would be considered as having enrolled in an 'other' level of qualification.

Statistical analysis using logistic regression was conducted to determine factors that influenced the likelihood of an enabling course student to enrol in a vocational course at a higher level of qualification in the following year.

Refer to Phan and Ball (in press) for more information on the methodology of the study.

Progression of enabling course students

Following their enrolment in an enabling course in 1997, just over 20% of these students decided to continue their studies in the vocational education and training sector in the following year. Of those who decided to continue their studies in the VET sector, almost a third enrolled in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification while almost half enrolled in a course at the 'same' level of qualification. Over 10% of

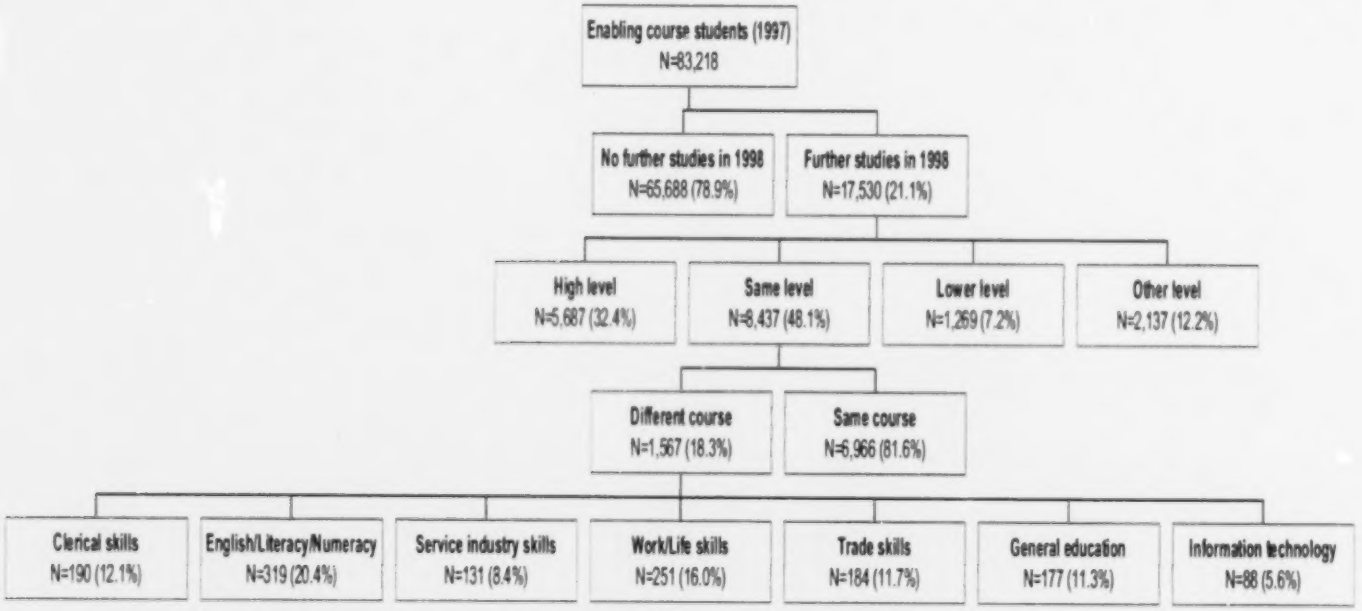
students enrolled in a course classified under an 'other' level of qualification, and less than 8% enrolled in a course at a 'lower' level of qualification (refer to Figure 1).

Although there was a large proportion of students enrolling in courses at the same level of qualification as that undertaken in the previous year, this does not necessarily mean that these individuals did not achieve a positive outcome following the completion of their enabling course. Many of these students diversified into other areas of learning. They undertook courses in clerical skills, service industry skills, work and life skills or knowledge in the information technology area. The skills and knowledge gained by these individuals may subsequently assist them to improve their employment prospects.

Of all enabling course students who continued their studies in the VET sector in the following year, just over 12% of these students enrolled in courses classified under the 'Certificate of competency', 'Certificate of proficiency', 'Endorsement to certificate' and 'Statement of attainment' levels of qualification. These qualification categories were introduced under the Register of Awards in Tertiary Education (RATE) system. Therefore, it was not feasible to make definitive conclusions on the effectiveness of enabling courses in assisting these individuals to progress to a higher level of education, since it is difficult to determine whether these qualification categories are better recognised than 'AQF senior secondary', 'AQF Certificate I' or 'AQF Certificate II'. However, 'Endorsements to certificates' were meant to be qualifications additional to trade certificates and some courses classified under the 'Statement of attainment' level could be classified as 'AQF Certificate IV' courses. Therefore, it could be assumed that the majority of these students have achieved a positive outcome following the completion of their enabling course.

However, over a tenth of students who continued their studies in the vocational education and training sector in the following year actually enrolled in a course at a 'lower' level of qualification than the one undertaken previously. This indicates that, while enabling courses are effective in producing positive outcomes for large number of students, they are not effective in assisting *all* students to achieve a positive outcome. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the proportion of students who enrolled in a 'lower' level of qualification was minimal. Less than 3% of all enabling course students actually moved into a lower level of qualification in the following year.

Figure 1: The progression of students within VET following the completion of their enabling course



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Progression of enabling course students from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds

The following section provides further analysis on the outcomes achieved by members of 'disadvantaged' backgrounds one year following an enrolment in an enabling course.

Age

Following the completion of their enabling course, students in the 50-64 age group were more likely to enrol in a course at the 'same' level of qualification as that completed in the previous year. These students were also more inclined to enrol in courses at a 'lower' level of qualification than their younger counterparts. Students in the 50-64 age group were also more likely to re-enrol in the same enabling course. In particular, students in the 60-64 age group were the most likely to re-enrol in the same enabling course in the following year.

Other things being equal, students in the 15-29 age group were significantly more likely to enrol in a course at a higher level of qualification than students in the 30-39 age group. The probabilities of students in the 15-19 and in the 20-24 age group enrolling in a higher-level course were respectively 66% and 59% higher than for students in the 30-39-year age group.

Students in the 40-59 age group, on the other hand, were significantly less likely to enrol in a higher level of qualification course than students in the 30-39 age group. The probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for students in the 40-49 age group was 20% lower compared to students in the 30-39 age group. Furthermore, the probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for students in the 50-59 age group was 39% lower in comparison to students in the 30-39 year age group.

Gender

While gender is not a factor that influences the likelihood of an enabling course student enrolling in a higher-level course, men were slightly more likely to enrol in a 'higher' level of qualification in the following year than women. Women in enabling courses were more likely to undertake studies at the 'same' level of qualification as that undertaken in the previous year.

Nevertheless, for those who enrolled in the same level of qualification in the following year, men were more likely than women to re-enrol in the same course.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent

Compared to other Australians, students who reported that they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent were less likely to enrol in a higher level of qualification. These students were more inclined to undertake 'lower' level courses or courses classified at 'other' levels of qualification.

For those who enrolled in a course at the 'same' level of qualification, students reporting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent were less likely to re-enrol in the same course than other students.

All things being equal, the likelihood of an enabling course student enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification was not influenced by his/her Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status.

Non-English-speaking background

Students who reported that they were from a non English-speaking background were less likely to enrol in a 'higher' level course. These students were much more likely to enrol in courses at the 'same' level of qualification and at a 'lower' level of qualification than their counterparts. In addition, for those who enrolled in the same level of qualification, students reporting that they came from a non English-speaking background were more inclined to enrol in the same enabling course in the following year than their counterparts.

Nevertheless, the probability of an enabling course student enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification was not dependent on a student's language background. All things being equal, the likelihood of an enabling course student enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification was not influenced by whether a student is from a non-English or an English-speaking background.

Disability

Students who reported having a disability were less likely to undertake further studies at a 'higher' level than their counterparts. About 57% of these students enrolled in the 'same' level of qualification compared to only 48% of students who reported that they did not have a disability. Students who reported having a disability were also more inclined than their counterparts to enrol in courses classified under the 'other' level of qualification category.

Enabling course students with an intellectual disability were most likely to enrol in the same level of qualification in the following year, while enabling course students with a visual, sight or hearing disability were more likely to enrol in a course at a higher level of qualification compared to students with other types of disabilities.

On the whole, students who reported having a disability were more likely than other students to re-enrol in the same course than other students.

Other things being equal, students who reported having a disability were significantly less likely to enrol in a course at a higher level of qualification following the completion of their enabling course than other students.

The probability of an enabling course student enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification was 37% lower for students who reported having a disability than for other students.

Lived in rural or remote areas

Students who were living in metropolitan areas or capital cities were more likely to enrol in courses at the 'same' level of qualification than students who were living in rural or remote regions. Moreover, students from metropolitan areas or capital cities were more likely to re-enrol in the same enabling course in the following year than students who came from rural or remote areas.

There was little variation in the proportion of students undertaking a course at a 'lower' level of qualification by their residential geographic region.

Students who resided in rural or remote regions were significantly less likely to enrol in a higher level of qualification course than those who lived in metropolitan areas or capital cities. All things being equal, the probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for students who lived in rural or remote areas was 24% lower than for students who lived in other regions of Australia.

Unemployed prior to the commencement of an enabling course

Students who reported that they were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course were slightly more likely to enrol in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification than students who were employed prior to an enabling course. These students were also less likely to enrol in a course at a 'lower' level of qualification than their counterparts.

Students who reported that they were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course were significantly more likely to enrol in a higher level of qualification course than other students. The probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for students who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course was 43% higher than for other students.

Early school leavers

Generally, students who reported that their highest level of secondary schooling was year 9 or below were the least likely to enrol in a course at a 'higher' level than students whose highest level of secondary schooling was year 10 or higher. These students were more inclined to continue their studies at the 'same' level of qualification or to enrol in courses classified under the 'other' level of qualification than their counterparts.

For those who continued to study at the same level of qualification in the following year, students who reported that their highest level of secondary schooling was below year 10 were more likely to re-enrol in the same course than other students.

Students who reported that their highest level of secondary schooling was below year 11 were significantly less likely to enrol in a higher level of qualification course than those who completed year 12 as their highest level of secondary schooling.

The probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for students whose highest level of secondary schooling was year 10 was 9% lower compared to students who completed year 12. The probability of enrolling in a higher-level course for students whose highest level of secondary schooling was below year 10 was 47% lower than for students whose highest level of secondary schooling was year 12.

Students from multiple 'disadvantaged' groups

Women who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course were more likely to undertake their further studies at a 'higher' level of qualification

than unemployed students from a non English-speaking background or unemployed Indigenous students.

Unemployed students from a non English-speaking background, on the other hand, were more inclined to continue their studies at the 'same' level of qualification than unemployed women or unemployed students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Unemployed students who reported that they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, however, were more likely to enrol in a course at a 'lower' level of qualification than unemployed women or unemployed students from a non English-speaking background.

Women from rural or remote areas were more likely to enrol in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification compared to students who reported that they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent living in rural or remote areas. Women from rural or remote areas were also more inclined to enrol in courses at 'other' levels of qualification than Indigenous Australians who were living in rural or remote regions.

Unemployed women were significantly more likely to enrol in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification than other students. The probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for women who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course was 16% higher than for other students.

On the other hand, women from a non English-speaking background were significantly less likely to enrol in a higher level of qualification than their counterparts. All things being equal, the probability of enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification for women from a non English-speaking background was 19% lower compared to other students.

Similarly, students indicating that they came from a non-English speaking background and that they were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course were significantly less likely to enrol in a 'higher' level of qualification course by comparison with other Australians. The probability of enrolling in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification for students who reported that they were from a non English-speaking background and unemployed prior to the commencement of an enabling course was 41% lower than for other students.

Students who reported that they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and unemployed before the commencement of their enabling course were also significantly less likely to enrol in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification than their counterparts. The probability for these students to enrol in a course at a higher level of qualification was 47% lower than for other students.

Implications from findings

The findings suggest that a large number of enrolments at the 'same' level of qualification in the following year were attributed to older individuals in the 40–64 age group, women, students from a non English-speaking background, students

with a disability and students whose highest level of secondary schooling was below year 10. Furthermore, students from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or students from a non English-speaking background were also more inclined to enrol in a course at a lower level of qualification than other Australians after the completion of an enabling course.

However, demographic characteristics were not necessarily factors influencing the likelihood of an enabling course student enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification. For instance, students in the 40–59 age group and those with a disability were significantly less likely to enrol in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification than their counterparts. Nonetheless, there was no difference in the likelihood of students from other 'disadvantaged' groups such as those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or from a non English-speaking background enrolling in a course at a 'higher' level of qualification compared to other Australians. Furthermore, the probability of enrolling in a higher-level course for students who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their enabling course was greater than for other students. Hence, many students from 'disadvantaged' groups are achieving a positive outcome from studying an enabling course.

Further research

Although enabling courses are effective in assisting many students to achieve positive outcomes, the tendency for some members from various 'disadvantaged' groups to enrol in a course at the 'same' level of qualification or to re-enrol in the same course in the following year requires further investigation. Qualitative research to identify reasons why some people decide to remain at the same level of qualification or to re-enrol in the same enabling course is required to address this issue.

Note

The AVETMIS Standard offers a nationally consistent standard for the collection, analysis and reporting of vocational education and training information throughout Australia.

Reference

Phan O and Ball K (in press) Outcomes from enabling courses. Leabrook, South Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

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